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SUBJECT: NINEWA: MAKHMOUR REFUGEE CAMP -- STILL NO SOLUTION  
IN SIGHT

REF: A. 2005 MOSUL 150

[B](#). 07 GENEVA 988

Classified By: Ninewa PRT Leader Jason Hyland: Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

Summary

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[1](#)1. (SBU) The director of the Makhmour refugee camp Ahmed Dzayee discussed the status and future of the camp with the PRT leader and representatives on January 15. He described the ways that people in the camp make a living, how the camp is supported and the security situation. New families moved into the camp in November. No progress has been made toward finding a durable solution for the refugees in Makhmour.

Makhmour: Background

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[1](#)2. (SBU) The Makhmour refugee camp was opened in 1991 to support a population of Kurdish refugees from Turkey. The refugees came into Iraq to escape hostilities between the Turkish government and the terrorist group Kongra-Gel/PKK. The camp was established by the Iraqi government and then turned over to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (ref a). Responding to concerns that the camp provided a safehaven for PKK activity and a fertile ground for new terrorist recruits, and as part of the trilateral GOT-GOI-U.S. process to counter the PKK, the Government of Turkey (GOT), the Government of Iraq (GOI) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), with the United States as an observer, attempted to negotiate and sign a Tri-Partite Agreement to find a durable solution for the residents of the Makhmour refugee camp. Negotiations stalled after an April 2007 meeting in Geneva revealed enduring differences among the parties (ref b).

[1](#)3. (C) In January 2007 the Iraqi Security Forces inspected the camp and turned up no weapons and no one professing to be PKK. After that, the UNHCR considered the civilian character of the camp restored and it appeared to lose the sense of urgency in closing it. The draft trilateral agreement remains stalled. UNHCR will not move forward with conducting a survey of camp residents to determine their resettlement preference following the camp's closure (return to Turkey, integrate elsewhere in Iraq, or third country resettlement), absent clear information from the GOT regarding what type of

assistance returnees to Turkey will receive and whether specific individuals will be subject to prosecution for past crimes. The Turks have refused to give such assurances regarding prosecution and GOT officials have said in the past that returnees from Makhmour would be eligible for the same, relatively small assistance package provided to internally displaced persons forced to move during the counter-insurgency operations in the 1990s. The GOT has held to its position that direct PKK influence over the camp and its residents must be brought to a halt before residents, true preferences on resettlement can be stated.

#### Camp Supported by the UN, with Help from the Kurds

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14. (SBU) In a 15 January meeting with PRT leader and representatives, the director of the Makhmour refugee camp Ahmed Dzayee said that the primary source of aid for the refugee camp remained UNHCR, with the Swedish humanitarian non-governmental organization Qandil and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) providing the rest. Dzayee stated that UNHCR had recently increased aid, especially for security. The Ninewa Government had improved its support to the camp with more frequent shipment of Public Distribution System (PDS) rations and fuel. However, PDS rations were frequently missing one or more items and fuel shipments were sporadic at best. The December bombing by insurgents of the bridge at Qayarra had severely hampered supply shipments to the camp, further reducing the amount of fuel delivered. Water supply continued to be a serious issue; lack of electricity impeded the pumping of water both from the town of Makhmour and from wells within the camp itself. The KRG had been sending four tankers per day of potable water to the

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camp from Erbil.

#### UNHCR Building New Schools

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15. (SBU) According to Dzayee, UNHCR had recently committed to building two new schools in the camp to alleviate over-crowding in the existing schools. 116 refugees from the camp were currently studying at the University of Erbil. They have been supported by the KRG with an additional stipend from UNHCR.

#### Refugees Rely on Outside Work

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16. (SBU) The men of the camp relied primarily on day labor for income, Dzayee said. Approximately 300 men traveled back and forth to Erbil every day while others relied on the local economy for jobs. Passes for travel outside the camp and into and out of the District were issued for a month at a time through the camp director himself. Dzayee also stated that residents of the camp were required to carry their UNHCR registration papers at all times when they were outside the camp.

#### Security not an Issue

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17. (SBU) Dzayee reported that the refugee camp was secure and there were currently no specific threat against the village of Makhmour or the camp. Security for the camp continued to be provided by the Ninewa Iraqi Police and supported by UNHCR.

#### New Families Arriving Still

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18. (C) In November 2007, 22 new families arrived from Turkey and requested refugee status and entry into the UNHCR camp. Dzayee told the Team Leader that UNHCR had recently conducted training and coordination as a precursor to the establishment of a committee to respond to new applications for refugee

status. The committee was comprised of camp management, additional UNHCR representatives, and representatives from the Makhmour police, court and Mayor,s office. New applicants would not be allowed into the Makhmour camp until the committee had screened each applicant and confirmed their refugee status. The mayor of Makhmour donated a building to be used to house potential applicants as well as conduct the screening process. The 22 new families were screened and granted refugee status and have moved into the camp. Four more new families had recently arrived and were awaiting completion of the screening process.

Comment

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¶9. (C) According to Dzayee, the intention of UNHCR was still to close the camp at Makhmour. However, no progress has been made toward a solution for its refugee population. Absent a solution, the camp will continue to need aid and support for the foreseeable future. Security does not seem to be an issue inside the camp.

¶10. (C) Embassy Comment: Recent Turkish military action against the PKK in northern Iraq may have created the political space necessary for the GOT to begin to take other non-kinetic steps as part of a comprehensive settlement to the PKK issue, to include re-consideration of an offer of limited amnesty to returnees from Makhmour. Post is encouraging re-engagement by the negotiating parties to seek a durable solution for the refugees and close the camp. UN SRSG Staffan De Mistura undertook to engage the UNHCR to urge that they approach the GOT to continue negotiations. S/I Satterfield raised the issue with GOT interlocutors in Ankara January 18.  
CROCKER